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ABSTRACT

A study investigated teachers' attitudes regarding whether journal writing is beneficial to teachers and students. The research focused on two types of journals: literature response journals, in which students explore thoughts on and reactions to a short story, poem or novel; and dialog journals, in which two or more students and/or teachers respond to each other's thoughts in a shared journal forum or bulletin board. To conduct the study, 30 writing instructors who were either presently using journals in their curriculum or were planning to use them were sent questionnaires with questions related to 4 categories: duration of journal writing assignments, student interest in them, student attitudes toward them, and advantages of them. Twenty-five teachers returned the survey. Results showed that journal writing is indeed beneficial to students and teachers. Teachers noted that: (1) journals should be implemented in a classroom because children do not get enough writing experiences; (2) journal writing allows everyone to respond and participate; (3) journal writing allows children to think while they write; and (4) journal writing helps to connect oral and written language. Those interested in incorporating journal writing into their lesson plans should provide positive feedback to children; develop a risk free environment; and invite students to write for a meaningful purpose and a genuine audience. (Contains nine references, one table, and a copy of the research survey.) (TB)

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Running Head: JOURNAL WRITING IS BENEFICIAL

Journal Writing is Beneficial

to Teacher Instruction and

Student Learning

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Abstract

This research paper's purpose was to determine if journal writing is beneficial to teacher instruction and student learning. This study may have great importance to teachers who would like to begin to utilize journal writing within their classroom. The actual research consisted of a journal survey given to thirty voluntary teachers who implement or plan to implement journal writing within their class instruction. The survey consisted of fifteen questions which were divided into four categories pertaining to journal writing. According to the journal survey results, journal writing is beneficial to teacher instruction and student learning.

Journal Writing is Beneficial to Teacher Instruction and Student Learning

"Literacy becomes most authentic and best learned when students use reading and writing to accomplish things that they view as meaningful and important (Rasinski, 1994)." The previous quotation strengthens the rationale of the reading and writing connection. Within the reading and writing connection students are encouraged to determine their own successful writing processes, which will further empower individual learning (Danielson, 1994). One way to inspire student responses is through student-centered journal writing methods. One Author states, "Journals are instruments that allow us to enter the minds and hearts of most students (Surbeck, 1994)." Journal writing assist students to discover and reflect on their own writing strategies. Two types of journal writing are dialogue and literature response journals. The question to be explored ask, "Is journal writing beneficial to students and teachers?"

Previous Knowledge Regarding Dialogue Journals

Dialogue journals are interactive, self-generated, and continuous written conversations which help to develop thinking and learning processes (Bintz & Dillard, 1994). Dialogue journal methods improve students' writing quantity and quality. These writing journals can be implemented between peer to peer or between student to teacher pairs; furthermore, a new personal relationship is developed (Rasinski, 1994).

"The dialogue journal method is based on six related premises which include the following:

1. What is experienced can be thought about.
2. What is thought about can be talked about or signed.
3. What is talked or signed about can be written down.
4. What is written can be read.
5. What is read can be understood.
6. What is understood can be communicated.

These premises are a crucial link between student experiences and communication (Reynolds, 1994)." Therefore, dialogue journal writing is one writing method which facilitates relevant experiences and communication strategies.

Previous Knowledge regarding Literature Journals

"Literature Journals are a repository for wanderings and wonderings, speculations, questioning a place to explore thoughts, and discover reactions (Hancock, 1993)." Within literature response journals students are encouraged to create responses about the literature in which they have read. These journal writing responses must be supported by personal decision making and individual involvement within a risk free successful environment. Furthermore, literature journals challenge readers to explore and expand their learning potential through exciting and creative responses.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the benefits related to journal writing according to teachers' knowledge and perspectives. For the purpose of this study, journal writing includes two types of journal writing, dialogue and literature response. The hypothesis to be explored states, "Journal writing is beneficial to student learning and teacher instruction."

Method

Participants

Real life data research has supported journal writing as a positive enlightening writing experience. Thirty instructional writing teachers voluntarily participated in a self-report survey. All thirty teachers had one factor in common, all teachers either implemented journals within their classroom or plan to implement them in the future.

Measures

A fifteen question Likert scale survey was utilized as the research measure. The survey consisted of items related to four major categories of journal writing. The four categories included: duration, student interest, attitudes, and advantages.

Procedure

Surveys were given to thirty teachers to self-report their responses. They were asked to choose and circle one response for each question: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree. They were asked to be honest with their answers and to provide comments when desired.

Results

Out of thirty teachers surveyed, twenty-five of the teachers responded which is a response rate of 83% returned. Within this survey questions were asked pertaining to the uses of writing journals. The following is a table of the results from the teacher survey.

Place Table 1 about here

Discussion

According to this survey the results indicate that journal writing is beneficial to teacher instruction and student learning. I have discovered that many current and future teachers are extensively implementing journal writing in various instructional situations. Within this survey many questions were asked pertaining to the use of writing journals. The following statements are some of the general comments in which I received from this survey:

*Journals should be implemented in the classroom because children do not get enough writing experiences.

*Journal writing gives everyone opportunities to respond to literature and questions.

*Journal writing allows children to think while they write; therefore, their writing is more personal and meaningful.

*Journal writing helps to connect oral and written language through another median.

In summary, in this survey the prominent methods of journal writing are dialogue and literature response journals. The primary reason why journals are utilized within the classroom is to promote personal expressive writing.

The following are realistic helpful guidelines to generate and support effective journal writing methods:

- Include journal sharing time in class (Osina, 1994).
- Provide positive reflective feedback (Roe, 1994).
- Develop a risk free environment (Lanski & Wham, 1994).
- Invite students to write for a genuine audience and a meaningful purpose.
- Establish a consistent routine which includes journal writing.
- Encourage students to utilize their natural writing voice within their responses (Burniske, 1994).

Journal writing is an authentic and meaningful method of response writing. Two methods of journal writing include dialogue and literature response journals, both of these methods are widely practiced and beneficial. After reviewing a journal writing survey, teachers feel journal writing is a supportive and expressive method of writing. Through journal writing, students explore various writing strategies and styles. Furthermore, journal writing encourages students to write more often for personal and school purposes. In conclusion, journal writing is beneficial, and it also links the

chain of communication for both the teacher and students, especially when proper guidelines are followed.

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Table 1

Percentages of Teacher's Responses to Survey Questions (n=25)

Statements	% Responses			
	SA	A	D	SD
1. Implement 3X/weekly	40%	24%	24%	12%
2. All year long	20%	36%	24%	20%
3. Daily basis/set length	24%	40%	36%	0%
4. Students choose topics	44%	24%	24%	8%
5. More motivated	60%	20%	12%	8%
6. Lit. & Dialogue response	12%	52%	28%	8%
7. Positive attitudes	84%	16%	0%	0%
8. Teacher instruction	20%	76%	4%	0%
9. Promotes involvement	92%	8%	0%	0%
10. Students like to write	8%	28%	52%	12%
11. Opportunities to respond	72%	20%	8%	0%
12. Expressive & com.	92%	8%	0%	0%
13. Meaningful & personal	84%	16%	0%	0%
14. All teachers implement	44%	32%	24%	0%
15. Continue to use journals	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Mean %	56%	26%	15%	3%
Total % SA+A=82%		Total % SD+D=18%		

Journal Survey

Please read the following statements and answer them as if you are going to implement journals in your (future) classroom. If you are currently writing in journals in your classroom, answer the questions from your present personal experiences. Thank you for your time!

ANSWERS:

SA=Strongly Agree
A=Agree
D=Disagree
SD=Strongly Disagree

STATEMENTS

CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE

Duration

- | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|----|
| 1. Journals should be implemented in classroom instruction at least 3X a week. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 2. Students should write in journals all year long. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 3. Students should write in journals on a daily basis for a set length of time. | SA | A | D | SD |

Student Interest

- | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|----|
| 4. Students write in their journals more often when they can choose their own topics. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 5. Students are motivated to write in journals. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 6. Literature response and dialogue journals encourage students to become interested in their writing. | SA | A | D | SD |

Attitudes

- | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|----|
| 7. Students' attitudes towards journal writing are positive and encouraging. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 8. Teacher instruction is emphasized through journal writing. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 9. Journal writing is another form of writing which promotes positive student involvement and interest. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 10. Overall, my students like to write in school. | SA | A | D | SD |

Advantages

- | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|----|
| 11. Journal writing gives everyone opportunities | SA | A | D | SD |
|--|----|---|---|----|

to respond to literature and questions.

- | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|----|
| 12. Journal writing is an expressive form of writing and communication. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 13. Journal writing is meaningful and personal. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 14. All teachers should implement journal writing in their classrooms. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 15. I will continue or begin to use journal writing in my classroom. | SA | A | D | SD |

Should all teachers implement journals in their classroom? Explain your answer.

If you were to change your journal writing procedure, what would you change?